Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 08856 291603Z
ACTION AID-31

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00
AGRE-00 IGA-02 EB-07 L-03 /060 W
----------291752Z 021986 /43
R 291507Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1118

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 8856

FOR NOOTER, AA/NE, FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID PFOR SY US
SUBJ: SYRIA FY 1978 CONGRESSIONAL PRESENTATION

REF: (A) DAMASCUS 8660, (B) STATE 304173

1. ALTHOUGH REF (A) WAS TRANSMITTED TO COMPLY WITH INSTRUCTIONS OF REF (B) TO PROVIDE AN ALTERNATE BREAK-DOWN OF THE FY 77 AND FY 78 AID PROGRAM FOR SYRIA, A REDUCTION IN THE FY 78 CP SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN LIGHTLY FROM EITHER THE PROGRAM OR POLITICAL POINTS OF VIEW. I HAVE FURTHER DISCUSSED THE RAMIFICATIONS OF SUCH A REDUCTION WITH RAMSEY AND WANT YOU TO BE AWARE THAT MY OWN STRONG RECOMMENDATION IS TO MAINTAIN THE FY 78 PRE-SENTATION LEVEL AT, OR AS CLOSELY AS WE CAN TO, DOLS 90 MILLION.

2. ON THE PROGRAM SIDE, WE MUST SERIOUSLY TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THAT THE ESTIMATE COST OF THE LATTAKIA-TARTOUS HIGHWAY PROJECT IS NOT AT ALL A FIRM FIGURE AND CANNOT BE MADE FIRM, OF COURSE, UNTIL THE FEASIBILITY STUDY AND DESIGN WORK HAVE BEEN COMPLETED. THE TERRAIN OVER WHICH THE HIGHWAY WILL BE BUILT WILL REQUIRE A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF DRAINAGE STRUCTURES -- CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 08856 291603Z

CULVERTS AND BRIDGES. THIS FACT ALONG WITH THE GENERAL YEARLY INCREASE IN COSTS MAY WELL MAKE THE $60 MILLION ESTIMATE ON THE LOW SIDE.

3. THE AKKAR PLAIN PROJECT HAS ALREADY, BECAUSE OF THE INJUNCTION TO REDUCE THE PRESENTATION LEVEL, BEEN

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

STRIPPED TOO THIN. THE ORIGINAL ESTIMATE FOR FINANCING
A COMPREHENSIVE AGRICULTURAL EFFORT THERE WAS FOR $28
MILLION. REDUCING THE ESTIMATE TO $13 MILLION WILL
CHANGE THE NATURE OF PROPOSED U.S. ASSISTANCE IN THAT
AREA. LIMITED FINANCING OF WHAT THE PRE-FEASIBILITY
STUDY INDICATES TO BE IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE INTEGRATED
AKKAR PLAIN EFFORT -- IRRIGATION, DRAINAGE AND TUBEWELLS --
WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HAMPER THE REALIZATION OF SIGNIFICANT
INCREASES IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY, THE PURPOSE OF
THE PROJECT. BY CUTTING BACK THIS WAY ON IMPORTANT
TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT, WE ARE NOT ONLY LIMITING
THE POTENTIAL PRODUCTION OUTPUTS BUT WE ARE ALSO NOT
CARRYING OUT ONE OF THE AVOWED PURPOSES OF OUR OVERALL
EFFORTS IN SYRIA; I.E., TO PROVIDE THE SYRIANS WITH
EXPERIENCE OF SPECIAL U.S. TECHNOLOGY AND KNOW-HOW IN
THE AGRICULTURE AREA.

4. MOST IMPORTANTLY, HOWEVER, THE POLITICAL REACTION
TO A PRESENTATION LEVEL LOWER THAN THE LEVEL FOR THE
PAST TWO YEARS CAN BE EXPECTED TO BE SIGNIFICANT.
UNFAVORABLE IMPACT IT WILL HAVE ON HIGHER LEVELS OF
THE SARG WHERE ALL DECISIONS ARE MADE WILL RUN COUNTER
TO OUR EFFORTS TO TRY TO COMMUNICATE OUR INTEREST IN
SYRIAN DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES, ENCOURAGE
GREATER SYRIAN INTEREST IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THEREBY MAKE
LEADERSHIP MORE AMENABLE TO PEACE FUL, POLITICAL SETTLE-
MENT OF ITS CONFLICT WITH ISRAEL. I WILL BE FACED WITH
DIFFICULT AND DELICATE TASK OF REFUTING IMPLICATION OF
DIMINISHING U.S. INTEREST BOTH IN SYRIAN ME ROLE GENERALLY
AND IN SYRIAN DEVELOPMENT IN PARTICULAR.
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 08856 291603Z

5. IN SUM, I CONSIDER THE REDUCED CP PRESENTATION
FIGURE FOR SYRIA A SERIOUS MATTER, BOTH IN TERMS OF
SUBSTANCE OF THE PROGRAM AND THE NEGATIVE POLITICAL
IMPACT HERE. I URGE THAT THE LEVEL BE RECONSIDERED AND
RAISED AS NEARLY AS POSSIBLE TO 90 MILLION FIGURE WE
AND SYRIANS HAVE BEEN USING.
MURPHY

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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